



# The GREGORIAN REVIEW



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# The GREGORIAN REVIEW

Studies in Sacred Chant and Liturgy

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English-language edition of the *Revue Gregorienne*

Bulletin of the School of Solesmes

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Bishop of Toledo

September 17, 1958

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## CONTENTS

Pope Pius XII.....	5
by Most Rev. George J. Rehring, S.T.D. Bishop of Toledo	
By Way of Editorial.....	7
The Sources of Mercy.....	13
by Dom Marc-Francois Lacan, O.S.B.	
The Truth of Gregorian Chant.....	19
by Dom Joseph Gajard, O.S.B.	
The <i>Kyrie</i> in Renaissance Polyphony.....	25
by Henri Potiron	
Reviews .....	33

Volume V, Number 5

September-October, 1958





## POPE PIUS XII

His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, Vicar of Christ, in the mysterious designs of Divine Providence has come to the end of an eventful and extraordinary Pontificate of nineteen years.

His death leaves a great void in the Church and in the world generally. As visible head of the Church he was our chief pastor, teacher, ruler, dispenser of the mysteries of God and guide to our heavenly destiny. He was one of the all-time immortal successors of Peter.

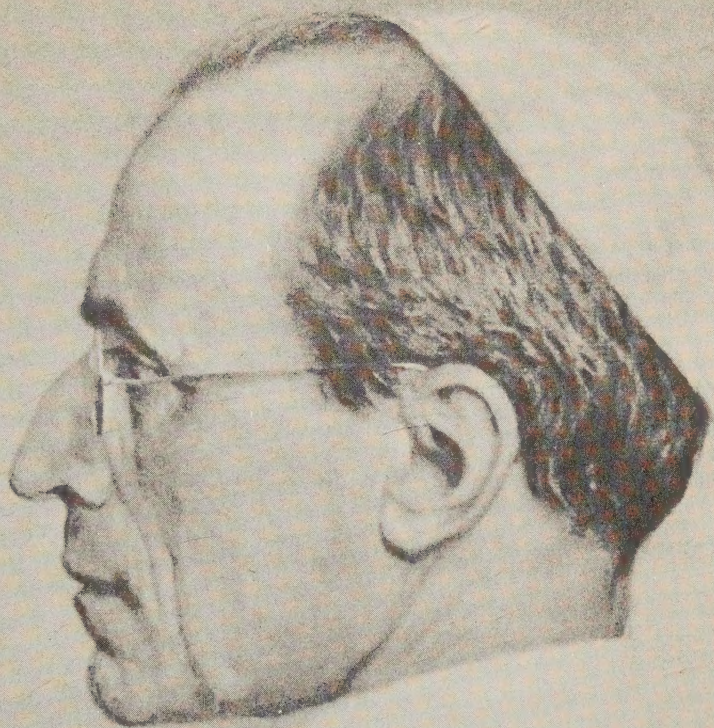
Pope Pius XII, ever striving to labor in full accord with the Divine Master, was concerned for the present and the eternal welfare of every member of the human family. Even with advancing age and declining health, he never gave a thought to his own convenience nor to his physical fitness in serving humankind. At all times he made himself available to the many millions who requested audience with him, never failing to address them with the all-embracing charity of Christ and never disappointing any group as he expounded on the morality of questions of profound intellectual and scientific import. More than anyone else he worked constantly, untiringly and constructively to bring about better understanding amongst nations with a view of laying the foundations for a permanent peace.

No wonder then, that the announcement of his death casts a shadow over all peoples and that our sorrow is shared by millions not of the household of the Faith.

Fervent prayers for the repose of his soul rise heavenward from every part of the globe. May the Good Shepherd grant His earthly Vicar the inexpressible happiness of the Beatific Vision!

MOST REV. GEORGE J. REHRING, STD  
Bishop of Toledo







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## BY WAY OF EDITORIAL

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—until I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more or less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

—*Through the Looking Glass*

We Catholics are sometimes inclined to view ourselves as spectators on the American scene . . . concerned with its events in a sense, but independent of them. This is a view which Catholic musicians share to some small degree, and in a larger sense, many non-musicians also hold it to be true. Support for such a viewpoint may be found in the also various manifestations of separation of Church and State which are emphasized in the United States and certain other nations, in the marked difference of quality which separates the music heard in our churches from that of the contemporary concert-stage, in the distinctions between Church law and the law of the land in matters such as divorce, birth-control, education and the like, and in a hundred other things which affect the lives of all of us.

Yet in some ways we are, as English-speaking people, closer to our non-Catholic neighbors than to European traditions, even those of Rome. In our dress, our manners, our material concerns, our political outlook, our social aspirations

and many other such facets of daily life we are indistinguishable from our non-Catholic countrymen. More significant than any other resemblance, however, is our adoption of the prevailing language and ideas of twentieth century democracy, for it is in this way that we have subjected our literature, our social concepts and even our artistic standards to influences which have not been previously exerted on Catholicism.

Musicians have come under these influences, too, although it may not be as apparent as it should be. Musicians, particularly church musicians, are concerned from time to time with writings and discussions about their art, and whether they wish it or not, such writings and discussions have become thoroughly penetrated by the current trends in language and style.

This brings us back to Humpty Dumpty.

Not long ago we received a letter from a music teacher who had read an article by us published in another magazine. The article dealt with congregational participation in the liturgy, and we had made heavy use of the adjective "active." Our correspondent, however, expressed disagreement with our use of this adjective. A church-goer, he told us, could be considered to be an "active" participant in the liturgy even though he sat in silence throughout the ceremonies, and even though he did not understand much of the actions or texts, providing that he came to church with the "right attitude." We have always believed that there was a difference between *active* and *passive*, and that the difference was antonymic. We are willing to concede that active participation in the liturgy is not essential for salvation, and that many people will pass their entire lives without having sung a note or read a line from a missal during liturgical ceremonies and yet not jeopardize their salvation because of the omission. We do wish to point out, however, that although passive participation is adequate in a consideration of essentials, active participation is better, in one sense, if only because it disposes the soul, when properly carried out, of

course, for a more fruitful utilization and reception of the sacramental graces offered by the sacred functions. To defend passive participation by confusing it with active participation removes the whole thing from the plane of argument, since there can be no common terminology for discussion. We must admit, however, that this humpty-dumpty-ish process of making words do one's bidding is marvelously effective in eliminating distasteful discussion by rendering it impossible.

In addition to this abuse of the word "active," we could list a dozen others, including "liturgical" (applied to anything we consider "good"), "art" (applied to anything which involves some kind of skill), "educational" (applied to anything which conveys a message or which entertains). Add to these the other cases in which false labels are made through misapplication of words which have had more specific meaning in the past. The first which comes to mind is the use of the term "sight-reading" to describe a stumbling process of singing through a "new" piece which is composed largely of melodic formulas and cliches which have been more or less memorized beforehand; this is seriously considered as a worthwhile technique in many college-level programs. We could go on and on, but there is no point in belaboring the matter.

The cause of this general loss of cogency in our everyday language and in our professional terminology is all too obvious. Majority rule, that vital element of the democratic process, has been extended to communication and to the arts, and woe to him who opposes the idea! As Clifton Fadiman grudgingly puts it, TelevenGLISH is the order of the day.<sup>1</sup> Levelese is the language of the future. According to the proponents of the new trend, the main thing is the conveying of an idea, and if the grammar, spelling or choice of words is not what purists would call "correct," well, so much the worse for the purists. Mr. Fadiman, who is opposed to the current trend, was taken to task for his purist approach by a national TV panel show which has set itself up as a

1. Fadiman, "Party of One", in *Holiday*, August, 1957, p. 6



“board-of-appeals” and supreme authority on use of modern English. He was chided for his efforts at clear diction, traditional spelling and such “outmoded” things. The fact is, however, that he is far more precise in his use of the language and in his expressing of ideas than the chairman of the panel<sup>2</sup> who criticized him.

Most musicians prefer to make music, not talk about it. It does become necessary, however, to discuss the good and the bad, the plus and the minus of the use of music in church, and lately this has been rendered more difficult by the encroachment of the new “Levelese” on the old domain of the King’s English. The above-mentioned case of the discussion of “active” participation is only one example. Yet we Catholic musicians are inclined to overlook this fact, and it is not uncommon to find Catholics who freely criticize non-Catholic musicians and teachers for their rough-shod ways with language, while in the very terms of criticism the critics prove that they are members of the same club.

As we have said in discussions of education in previous issues, the Catholic teacher cannot afford the luxury of vagueness. He cannot afford to pad his statements with extravagant but meaningless jargon, regardless of how impressive or pseudo-professional it may sound. In the same way, the church musician cannot afford to play Humpty Dumpty with vital issues. Roman pronouncements on church music are couched in a language which has not undergone the expansion-of-meaning process which has undermined English. It is remarkable, however, that commentators on, for example, the Encyclical *Musicae Sacrae Disciplina* have produced studies in everyday English which convey any of a dozen different impressions, all claiming authenticity, of what the Holy Father really meant to say. This ridiculous diversity is supported by some of the most extraordinary definitions or implied definitions of terms in recent history. This example is one of many which could be cited as indicative of the trend to make words serve special interests.

2. “He Talks Good, Like A Professor Should”, *TV Guide* for Sept. 13-19, 1958, p. 28

Others could be taken from the pages of periodicals and books on liturgical matters, almost at random.

Catholic musicians and scholars, however, do have the sharpening influence of vigorous international communication to compel them to treat words with respect. In this sense we are really in a different position from that of our non-Catholic neighbors who may often carry out their discussions and deliberations without the perspective supplied by such outside relationships. This has not prevented us from flights of scholarly jargon and meaningless redundancies, but it brings us down to earth often enough to let us think about what we have tried to say.

It is currently out-of-fashion to be conservative in matters intellectual. It is, in fact, almost a matter of national pride to be progressive and liberal (the terms are difficult to separate in modern usage) in everything from dress and diet to choosing the color of the family car. It is only a small step from such material questions to the realm of ideas, and the things of the mind are well on the way to the enjoyment of the fruits of this "progress."

No one is interested in a return to the forms of Elizabethan English, but we wonder whether the concept of the *Academie francaise*, often criticized as ivory-towered and pedantic, is not a valid concept for any language in which serious scholarly work is to be done. It would not be possible to entertain the idea of such a thing for the English language, but if French scholars found such a drastic measure necessary in an age which was not particularly self-conscious or more than vaguely aware of the erosion of word-meanings, how much more necessary is it that we, in the midst of deliberate efforts to reduce English to a blunt tool, an awkward conglomeration of vague terms, exert some kind of influence to preserve those elements of language which are vital to our future ability to convey to one another something more profound than the non-sequiturs of a TV commercial? We repeat: we expect no general organized effort, but instead of the current tendency to follow the herd it would

## GREGORIAN REVIEW

be refreshing and reassuring to note that Catholic scholars, at least, in fields as important as the liturgy and church music, are willing to be old-fashioned and use language with that outmoded precision by which a spade, strangely enough, was not a hoe or a rake, but merely a spade.



## THE SOURCES OF MERCY

by Dom Marc-Francois Lacan, O.S.B.  
Choirmaster of Hautecombe Abbey

*With an eternal love, I have pity on thee,  
saith Yahweh, thy Redeemer. (Is. 54, 8.)*

Among the compositions of the Gregorian repertoire, those of the *Kyriale* form the part which, by right, belongs to the general Christian populace. These are pieces, the performance of which, as a rule, is easier than those of the ornate pieces of the Proper of the Mass. We must not, however, conclude that they are less beautiful, merely because they are more simple. In their very simplicity, perhaps because of that very simplicity, they have an expressive value which raises many of these melodies to the level of masterpieces.

In order that the faithful may appreciate these masterpieces and participate in their performance, two conditions must be determined in advance: (1) we must explain to them the meaning of the text which they are to sing, a text of utter simplicity, yet quite profound, which will become an inexhaustible source of prayer for the deeply attentive soul; (2) we must also show how the melody brings out the meaning of the text, accenting this or that aspect of its many facets, and then shapes our prayers while it helps them to achieve full expression. We know that the value of this shaping process stems from the fact that it comes from the Church itself, and that by uniting ourselves to it we take part in the general movement of prayer of the Church.

The supplication *Kyrie eleison* is addressed to the Lord, "*Kyrie*", and to Christ, "*Christe*", and we ask for mercy, "*eleison*". The number of invocations, grouped in three series, leads the thoughts of the faithful toward the three

Divine Persons, more completely to the degree that the second series of invocations is addressed to Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. This orientation of the *Kyrie* to the Trinity is entirely fitting; we need not try to justify it. We seek, in fact, to call attention to the importance of the titles "Lord" and "Christ", by showing the meaning of these titles in Scripture.

We know that the Apostle Peter, on the first Pentecost, in speaking to the crowd which was astounded at the enthusiasm of the disciples, now filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus and explained its meaning. By that resurrection of which the Apostles are witnesses, by that resurrection of which the coming of the Holy Spirit is a direct result as well as a visible proof for all, God has made this Jesus whom Israel had crucified both *Lord* and *Christ*. (Acts, 2, 32-36).

Peter applies the two names of Lord and Christ to the risen Jesus, sending forth the Holy Spirit from the heights of heaven where He is exalted at the right hand of God. For his hearers, these words of Peter had a messianic meaning; they stated that Jesus was truly the Christ, that mysterious Being awaited by Israel, that Anointed One, that Consecrated One Who was to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. They stated, too, that this Christ, sent by God to His people, was the *Lord*, a royal title. God had given to His Christ, as the psalms had foretold, the power to rule the universe in His Name. This is what a listener of the Old Testament could have understood in listening to St. Peter. In the Greek Old Testament, the word *Kyrios* is an honorary title which applied in particular to kings and which was suitable for the King of Israel, this Son of David, Who the Messiah was to be.

The title of *Kyrios* had, however, another meaning in the Greek Bible. It was also a divine title. It was by this word that the Hebrew word *Yahweh* was translated, the proper name of God, the sacred name which expressed the transcendancy of the true God, and at the time of Our Lord, no one dared to pronounce it commonly.

Applied to the Messiah the title of *Lord* could thus have two meanings: it might indicate that Christ had the right to exercise that universal royalty which belonged to God alone, Creator of the universe; it could also mean that Christ had the right to the greatest Name of all, the very Name of the Thrice-Holy. This second sense was, to a Jew, a scandal, for the Messiah that the Jews expected was to be a man, and to them, a man could not be God. This second sense, however, was the profound meaning of St. Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it is the sense of our liturgical invocation: *Lord, have mercy*. If Jesus is King and universal Lord, it is because He is the Son of the eternal King, the only Son of the only God, the *Lord*.

This Jesus, the Son of God, is also that man Who fulfilled all the promises of God to His people, that Christ Who surpassed the expectations of Israel, that mysterious *Servant of Yahweh* of the Book of Isaiah, Who has saved the world by His voluntary death. It is this same Son of Man Who will judge the world and Who will raise up those who will have believed in Him. He is the living revelation of divine mercy; it is by Him that this mercy releases us from our sins and gives us eternal life.

We must direct our thoughts to this concept during the Eucharistic sacrifice which brings to us the fruits of forgiveness and life, of the redemption accomplished by Christ, Our Lord. For this reason at the beginning of the Mass, the Church has us invoke the mercy of Christ. He is the sōle Mediator Who obtains mercy for us. This name "Lord" is reserved to Him by St. Paul, and he uses the name of God when he speaks of the Father.

It is, therefore, perfectly permissible to raise these nine invocations of the *Kyrie* to Christ. He is Our Lord. Moreover, it will not be tantamount to overshadowing the orientation of the supplication to the Trinity. To ask mercy of the Lord Jesus, as did the sinful woman who prostrated herself at His feet, as did the blind and leprous of Palestine, is also to ask mercy of the Father, by using the means which the Father wants us to use, acting by mediation of



Him Who is the only Way to reach the Father. To invoke Jesus as the Lord is to glorify the Father Who has given us His Son as Redeemer. It is to proclaim our faith in the mercy of the Father Who will save those who believe in Jesus. To invoke the mercy of Christ the Lord is to ask of Him that Spirit Whom He has promised to us, and Whom He pours into the hearts of those who invoke Him. To invoke Christ as the Lord is, moreover, to honor the Holy Spirit by following the impulse which He gives us, for this invocation is an act of faith which procures salvation for us (Romans, 10, 9), and we are capable of this act only under the movement of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians, 12, 3).

Under this movement of the Spirit we invoke Our Lord by means of nine invocations for mercy. Why do we not vary this plea by invoking, for example, His power or His fidelity?

The insistence of the Church in having recourse to the mercy of the Lord recalls to us our misery and our need of forgiveness. This attitude of the Church leads us to take the position of the publican in the Gospel, the attitude of true prayer, the attitude of humility.

The insistence of the Church in repeating "*eleison*" has another motive. To the verb *eleo* (from which comes the form *eleison*) corresponds to the noun *eleos*, which designates an attribute of God. Among these attributes this is the one which brings us to penetrate more deeply the mystery of God, and this is the one which most powerfully touches His heart. The word *eleos* designates a divine title which God loves to hear us sing, perhaps the one which He prefers.

To understand the deep meaning of this word, we must remember that the liturgical vocabulary borrows heavily from the biblical vocabulary, and in particular from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In this translation the word *eleos* most often designates the divine quality expressed by the Hebrew word *hesed*, the meaning of which is very rich, richer than that of *eleos* itself.

The proper meaning of *eleos* is mercy. To understand the meaning of *hesed*, we must remember the choice which God has made of the people of Israel. With this nation God links Himself through an Alliance which makes of this people His first-born children (Ex., 4, 22). By reason of this choice and this Covenant, God is Father to His people, and He loves His children with *paternal love*. *Hesed*, then, is that love in its richness, with all its nuances. The Old Testament shows us this love at work: God teaches His people; He reveals Himself little by little to them. He prepares them for the coming of Him Who is the living revelation of His love: Jesus, His Son, Our Saviour. Let us read but one text, one of the finest of the Bible; God defines Himself in it.

“Yahweh, the tender and compassionate God, slow to anger, rich in love (*hesed*) and in fidelity, Who prolongs His love (*hesed*) to a thousand generations . . .” (Ex., 34, 6-7).

He thus defines Himself at the very moment when His people have just betrayed Him in worshipping the golden calf, immediately after the deliverance from Egypt and the Covenant of Sinai.

We perceive the meaning of this *hesed* of God. It is a paternal love, a free and inexhaustible love, a true and merciful love, the saving love which restores the prodigal son, which leads him back and enfolds him.

It is to this love that the Church appeals in ceaselessly repeating *eleison*. The *eleos* of God is not merely His mercy, but also that divine love which is the source of His mercy. It is that charity which is God Himself (I Jo., 4, 8, 16), that charity which not merely pardons us, but also makes us children of God (Ib., 3, 1) and able to love God with that same love by which God loves us.

Our singing of the *Kyrie eleison* is addressed to that charity, and it lies open to that charity that it may be more

and more deeply poured into our souls. It is united to that charity of which it asks salvation for all mankind. This tells us what adoration, what confidence and what ardor must animate our singing.



## \*THE "TRUTH" OF GREGORIAN CHANT

by Dom Joseph Gajard, O.S.B.  
Choirmaster of Solesmes

Moreover, it is by and through the Church that the Holy Spirit speaks. We are, we must not forget, on a supernatural level. Our personal ego must disappear.

Then, too, it is to the Church that we must address the beautiful request of the Apostles to the Lord: "*Doce nos orare*, teach us to pray. It is only through your hands, your lips and your heart that we wish to receive the true shaping of our own prayer and of our relationship to God."

Another objection, perhaps more prevalent, is that the chant is an ideal, good maybe for monasteries, but which we cannot admit to parish use. The prayer of the faithful within the parish supposedly could not be like that of monks . . . it would need to be much more external in its manifestations. This, of course, is a fundamental error. Too often when we speak of the liturgy, of liturgical life or spirituality, we view these as "Benedictine property." There is not, obviously, any strictly Benedictine spirituality. As has been so well said, it was not a question, for St. Benedict "of blazing a trail through Christian life, a sort of special pathway to God, but rather to simply take the national route, that of the Church, in order to accomplish the whole Gospel in the manner and in the form which the Church follows in living it out, in the course of its daily official life. Our life is the integral supernatural one, not fragmentary or partial, but the traditional life of the Church."

And, to make a passing observation, perhaps this is the reason for which the faithful of all walks of life who come

\* Second and concluding part of this article.

## GREGORIAN REVIEW

to our monasteries to attend the ceremonies are so much at ease there and draw such rich fruits from their visit. From the first moment they feel at home, in a catholic atmosphere, that to which their whole soul aspires on the very basis of their baptism. Many times we have experienced this, and we daily hear avowals of this sort.

The only difference between monasteries and secular churches is that we, the monks, are required to sing only Gregorian chant (a fortunate rule which gives our ceremonies and our life that wonderful simplicity and sober aspect), whereas the parish church can add to it polyphony, either classical or modern, and hymns, according to the indications of the *Motu Proprio* of St. Pius X and other more recent legislation. Polyphony and hymns admit by their basic notions more external brilliance, more freedom of expression (which does not mean that they are necessarily more beautiful or more prayerful); this is basically private devotion. By all means, let us profit from them and bring to their disposal all the musical materials which are fitting, without, however, allowing exaggerations, for it is easy to succumb to excesses, glaring examples of which are all too numerous. But, for Heaven's sake, when we sing the Gregorian melodies, let us respect their proper character and be careful not to convey to them in a thoughtless manner the spirit and style of profane music . . . or even religious concert-music. Let each kind of music keep its own style: *Hoc sit quod dicitur*, to use an expression dear to St. Benedict.

Gregorian chant remains the prayer of the Church, whether it be sung by the monks or merely by the faithful. Its interpretation should be precisely the same in parish churches as in monasteries. There are not really two authentic ways of praying; there is only one . . . that of the Church, just as there is only one religious *economia*, complete and definitive . . . that which has been presented by the Lord: *Multifariam multisque modis olim Deus loquens patribus in Prophetis, novissime in diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio, quem constituit haeredem universorum, per*

*quem fecit et saecula.*<sup>1</sup>

There is only one God, one Faith, one Baptism, in which all souls are absorbed equally. All souls, redeemed by the same divine Blood, tend toward the same end by the same means . . . sacraments and prayer. The souls of the ordinary faithful have the same needs as the souls of monks; of this, too we are given evidence daily. It would be a strange exaggeration and distortion to pretend otherwise.

This, then, brings us to the question of the edification of the faithful, which present thinking likes to raise as an objection to our viewpoint and which has opened the door to so much misunderstanding.

The edification of the faithful (education, if you will) is not one of the principal *purposes* of the liturgy, even though, in the divine plan, it turns out to be a necessary *product* . . . like a kind of infallible consequence. Here, again, we must avoid pitfalls of sentiment; we remain always within the scope of doctrinal perspective.

In a design of obvious simplicity, God has intended that the very processes of the Redemption and of the sanctification of souls would be also those of His own glorification. In other words, the same actions by which we praise God are those which sanctify us. According to the doctrine of St. Paul, the Redemption was accomplished once and for all on the Cross by an act of total adoration and obedience to God. The sacraments, which are the authentic channels of grace, have no other object than to transmit to us the benefits of this universal Redemption accomplished by the sacrifice on Calvary. The Eucharist, in particular, about which the whole liturgy revolves as about a center, is primarily, as its name indicates, a praise and thanksgiving to God. It is only secondarily and as a kind of by-product that it reaches us. In the liturgy, as in the sacraments, our actions

1. After having spoken, at various times and in diverse manners, to our fathers through the prophets, in olden times, God has, in our day, spoken to us through His Son, Whom He has established as Heir of all things, and by Whom He also created the world. (Hebrews, I, 1-2)

are not sufficient for our salvation; they merely dispose us for the reception of grace. The entire action of sacrifice comes from God, through the Church. Thus, the more we withdraw ourselves and give the main role to God, the more assured is the effect of redemption within us.

Thus there is no danger of jeopardizing the spiritual interests of the faithful when we think first of God's praise. The faithful will be sanctified to the extent that the Office will have attained its essential and primary goal: the glorification of God. Generally speaking, there is far too much concern for what the faithful can understand. Although the purely vocal question does have considerable importance, it is not as essential that the voices performing the liturgy should carry to the more remote corners of the church, as it is so often stated, but that they carry to the altar, and it is in being directed toward the altar that they are effective for the intentions of the faithful. "It is precisely because you do nothing specifically intended to move us listeners that your Office is so moving," a musician, who was not then Catholic, told us one day. We could cite many such examples of expressions from the mouths of our guests, all of singular significance. They are not, of course, indifferent to the artistic beauty of the music, but it is that profundity of prayer which they sense through the chant and which enhances their love of the supernatural life.

The faithful have nothing to lose . . . on the contrary . . . in maintaining for the great forms of Catholic prayer this reserve, deliberation and sobriety in expression, this sense of the hierarchy of values. Nothing could be more advantageous for souls . . . those of today as well as those of all time. In fact, today it may be more opportune than ever. In the midst of the great upsets and destruction which surround us, in this atmosphere of terrible uncertainty in which we live, what we need most of all, we must agree, is to rediscover the love of tranquility, silence and peace.

By its entire modal and rhythmic technique the Gregorian melodic line is marvelously suited to attaining this for us. By its supernatural inspiration and by that sweet



and powerful odor of holiness which no one can forget who has ever come into real contact with it, it excels in capturing souls and taking them into that blessed region where God awaits them. In every way it is an unsurpassably effective process of moral and supernatural formation. And if, as has been so well said, Greek music "had as its mission and ideal more to bring order and rhythm to souls than to agitate them,"<sup>1</sup> our sacred melodies, thanks to their technique and their inspiration, achieve to a degree which has never been surpassed the ideal dreamed of by the philosophers of ancient times.



We might have given examples and shown by means of a few pieces how the Gregorian melodies, always serving the text in which they beautifully underscore the most subtle nuances, excel in shedding light on the true character of the feasts and even go so far sometimes as to take on the characteristics of a treatise of spirituality by the way in which they lead us to God. I have made a brief allusion to this above. The entire Gregorian repertoire would be infinitely interesting to examine from that point of view.

We would see, for example, how even the awareness of acute misery of the soul touched by sin never leads to despair, or even merely to sadness, but that it expands always into confidence and awareness of the divine mercy (Introits *Circumdederunt me*, *Inclina* or the Offertory *Precatus est* or the Gradual *Miserere mihi*); also, how the soul, aware at first of its personal interests, even in its supernatural joys, forgets itself little by little to become lost in the contemplation of God, viewed and loved for Himself alone (Introits *Suscepimus*, *Puer natus est*, or the Gradual *Laetatus sum*), or how everything finally comes back to an act of faith, hope and charity (Introits *Esto mihi*, *In voluntate tua*, or such pieces as the Offertory *Tui sunt*).

Do you not sense this tendency to carry everything to God, this longing of the soul to return to Him, always and in

1. Camille Bellaigue, Op. cit., p. 56

everything, and to view always only God? Do you see the essentially "contemplative" character of the Gregorian melodies?

I cannot help recall these words of Dom Delatte, defining, in his *Commentaire de la Regle*, p. 349, the method of prayer of the Christians of early times, which we could not pass without citing:

"The method of praying was simple and easy: to forget oneself and live in habitual recollection, to immerse one's soul in the very beauty of the mysteries and to interest oneself in all the aspects of the supernatural plan . . . It was believed that the words of God, the Saints and the liturgy, ceaselessly studied and repeated, had a supreme grace for drawing the soul gently from the disturbing self-centered concerns and cares of itself, in order to capture it and introduce it to the mystery of God and His Christ. Once at this point . . . there remained nothing more but to contemplate and love."

# THE KYRIE IN RENAISSANCE POLYPHONY

by Henri Potiron

The conditions of choral polyphonic writing are not the same as those of monodic writing of Gregorian chant. That is quite obvious, but even the composition does not follow the same laws.

Since this sacred music of the Renaissance is held up to us as a model, even though it is not the *official* music of the Church, let us analyze a few examples of the *Kyrie*. We have selected these because they are very different, one from the other, and also because these particular masses are available to everyone. They are united in one aspect: their general aesthetic, which is close to the Gregorian aesthetic in its prayerful serenity.

Gregorian chant is clearly punctuated by nine independent phrases, including three *Kyries*, three *Christes* and three *Kyries*. The generally ternary plan is underscored by the intervention of the *Christes*, which, in a way, form the center of this prayer.

In the Renaissance the composer has, naturally, kept this ternary plan, but in the detail of the nine invocations he is often contented with a secondary punctuation which sometimes offers us more than three *Kyries* or three *Christes*. Everything seems to be determined as though the repetitions called for by the liturgy were here translated into the developments of the composition itself.

Let us first look at the *Kyrie* of the Mass *Douce memoire* of Lassus. We must not look for involved counterpoint in this example, even though the four voices are very independent rhythmically. There is no superposition of themes, no fugal style (in the *Sanctus*, however, the *Hosanna*

is treated in canonical imitation). Is there, in this work, even so much as a thematic unity? There are a few reminiscences in the course of the mass, to be sure, but for the most part these are reminiscences of mood and style. The real interest lies in the melodic treatment and in the choice of harmony.

This is particularly true of the *Kyrie*, which we give in the original key:<sup>1</sup>



Only the little formula of the second *eleison* will be imitated by the alto, then by the bass twice. Everything then flows on in the same melodic and harmonic atmosphere, with some secondary modifications, without real cadences, up to the end of the first part. But if we count honestly there are at least four *Kyries*.

The *Christe* enjoys the same freedom in its composition. Let us, however, note the second *Christe*, in which the modulation to A minor takes a striking expression, which grows up to the cadence of this part:

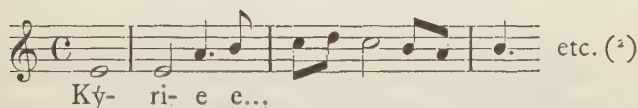


1. We know that in those days the notation did not presuppose a fixed series of pitches. In this sense, it was very much like Gregorian chant. After having taken the relative pitch, the singers were concerned only with the intervals. Our modern editions are aimed at finding a practical key. Those of Bordes, however, usually raise the original notation by a major third, which gives too strained a tessitura for most choirs.



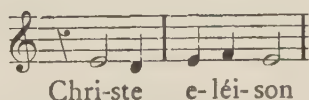
The third section in no way recalls anything which went before. It is primarily characterized, in the second half, by flowing passagework in the three upper voices, before the conclusion, which is made in complete serenity. Moreover, although the *Christe* repeats its own invocations six times, the final *Kyrie* includes the phrase *Kyrie eleison* no less than seven times.

The *Kyrie* of the *Missa quarti toni* of Vittoria is much shorter. It is not, however, less expressive, but the writing is clearly contrapuntal, and even fugal. The "subject" is given in the soprano, and it receives its classical "answer" in the alto, after only a measure has been sung. The same interplay occurs, a bit further on, between the tenor and bass:



There is a renewal of the subject in the tenor to lead to the cadence. If we admit that the final *Kyrie eleison* forms a unit with what precedes it, without a real solution of continuity, we must recognize the fact that we have, in this first part, only three distinct invocations.

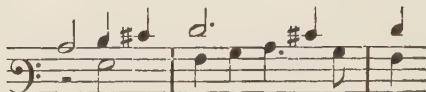
It would be the same for the *Christe*, if we consider the soprano line as the main one, and if we accept the linking of the final *Christe* also to the third. This is the principal theme:



2. In regard to the original notation and the transcriptions of Bordes and other editors, the same observations hold as were given previously in regard to the *Mass Douce memoire*. The same may be said of the *Missa sine nomine* of Palestine, which will be cited.

This is still a fugal exposition: subject in the bass, stretto answer in the alto, subject in the soprano, answer in the bass by augmentation. Then a new entry in the bass begins on A with a particularly expressive B flat.

The spirit of the fugue continues to dominate the composition of the third part. This is the subject:



After the entry of the four voices, various reminiscences lead to a magnificent and sober conclusion. In this case there are really only three very clear invocations.

The so-called “*sine nomine*” Mass of Palestrina begins with a *Kyrie* which is an orderly and orthodox exposition of all the elements used in the composition of the mass, a process which is not usually the case, even for the *Missa quarti toni* of Vittoria (except for the use of the final theme in certain passages, notably the *Hosanna*). Here is the principal theme accompanied by its “counter-subject”:

#### Principal subject



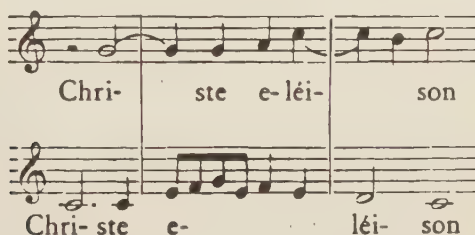
## POLYPHONIC KYRIE

Then, another element, which will lead to the cadence formula:



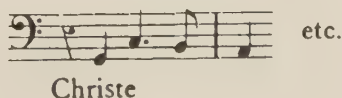
There are three very distinct invocations.

There are also three invocations in the second part, which contains two elements of composition. Here is the first element with its "counter-subject":



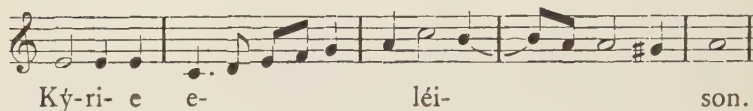
First comes the alto and soprano, then the bass and tenor.

A second element occurs, repeated canonically:



It is also noteworthy that this second part is written in what we today call the "relative" major of the original key of A minor, namely C major, if we may use tonal terms for this pre-tonal music. This C major passage brings in a modulation to G major about half way through its working out.

The third period has the following as its main theme:



There are only two invocations in the soprano. In this case, however, it would seem that the bass is more important, as it contains three very distinct invocations.

The strictness of the composition is very evident in this mass, particularly if we compare it with the *Mass Douce Memoire*. Yet, with very different means and procedures, there is a single musical and liturgical aesthetic result.

Let us not spend time on the gradual decline of this great art. It still had some brilliant moments in the first half of the seventeenth century. The style of the spiritual concert, however, as well as those of the great motets with soloists, choir and orchestra, the oratorio and the cantata, and later the symphony, eventually imposed their mannerisms on the composition of masses themselves. The music of these later works is sometimes excellent, but the liturgy does not receive its due. The *B Minor Mass* of Bach, for example, which is perhaps the highest summit of all music, and which is certainly of profoundly religious inspiration, is in reality a great cantata, and it cannot form part of the repertoire of liturgical polyphony, if only because of its proportions. The masses of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven (think of the length of his D major!), Schubert and others borrow elements of style from the symphony. We can draw no lessons from them whatsoever, at least in the sense discussed here.



Later came things like the annoying *St. Cecilia Mass* of Gounod, about which nothing remains to be said. What, moreover, can be said of the *Kyrie* of Franck, with its twelve invocations in the first part, divided into two broad phrases in the cadence, thus producing a binary form?

The "Caecilian School" reacted somewhat violently, but no real school could be produced by a kind of writing which was too often rule-of-thumb and empty of musical substance. Only a few names, *rari nantes*, deserve to be remembered. Basically the second half of the nineteenth century was a time of groping and experimentation.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century we finally arrive at a code of law for sacred music, the famous *Motu Proprio*. Every publisher immediately added to his title pages the phrase "Mass in conformity with the *Motu Proprio*," no doubt more from opportunism than from sincerity. In the course of this half century there have been good masses written (therefore, good *Kyries*). Many, many more, however, are either mediocre or bad. The reason is that our efforts are not united. We do not have what we could call a "school." I might say that we do not have a "tradition," were it not for the fact that this word is so often taken in the wrong sense.

The *Motu Proprio* has defined the path for us quite clearly. In this spirit, it would seem, this is what we may ask of composers of masses: (1) musical ideas, that is, imagination, *vulgo* inspiration; (2) absolute mastery of techniques, assimilated and sublimated, both composition and form; (3) knowledge of Gregorian chant, model of liturgical music, not only in its technique, but through meditation and love; (4) interpretation, above all, and analysis of the form given to the text by the Gregorian melody, as the *Motu Pro-*

1. We have no intention of getting into the musical history of the polyphonic *Kyrie*, even briefly. At the time in question, the end of the nineteenth century, there were, however, interesting attempts. We might mention Gounod's *Messe Chorale*, in spite of its lengths and platitudes, as well as those of Widor and Vierne, but that sort of thing is beside the point.

*prio* expressly puts it. Thus, in the case of the *Kyrie* there are nine invocations, not necessarily separated by cadences in the accepted sense, but at least by some kind of intelligent punctuation. Such a concept is not only well-adapted to the general ternary form, but is applicable easily to a multitude of musical forms: contrapuntal or fugal treatments, superposition of themes, harmonic style, thematic complexity or unity, modal or tonal style, etc. The composer is not only *not* impeded, but he is positively aided in the construction of his work. Perhaps the romantic effusions or the caricatures of certain "modernisms" will not work out well with such a form, but nobody will bother to complain about that.

## REVIEWS

### Books, Music and Records

*The New Saint Basil Hymnal*, Compiled by the Basilian Fathers, Toronto, published at Cincinnati, Ohio, Ralph Jusko Publications, Inc., 1958, 8¾x6, xvi, 335 pp., including index, \$2.50 (Accompaniment Edition), voice edition not received.

"*The New Saint Basil Hymnal* is exactly what its name implies; it is not a mere revision of an older book; it is a new one." Thus writes the editorial board in the foreword of the book.

The *Saint Basil Hymnal* has already had a long career. First published in 1889, the contents were in keeping with the prevailing norms and taste of a period that bred church music composers such as Battmann, La Hache, Gruber, Millard and the like. When, in 1903, the *Motu Proprio* of Saint Pius X proposed new standards for the music to be used in the Temple of God, several successive efforts were made by the editors to weed out the *Saint Basil* and bring it up to the requirements of better musical taste. Several editions were put out with the claim that they conformed with the prescriptions of the *Motu Proprio*. But time and again this claim was rejected by authorized liturgical organisms, and the *Saint Basil* remained condemned.

But this did little to stop its circulation. Old and not-so-old copies still can be found in innumerable choir lofts where the liturgical broom hasn't penetrated, and congregations are still proclaiming their love of Mary with the sounds of "Bring Flowers of the Fairest", and their devotion to the Sacred Heart with the mighty stanzas of "Like a Strong and Raging Fire", to the tune of "The Vacant Chair."

*The New Saint Basil Hymnal* is truly a new book, and there is more than an attractive green cover and a strong binding to substantiate this assertion. It contains a wide choice of beautiful English hymns. To the traditional ones have been added numerous new tunes contributed by leading contemporary church musicians. There is also an abundance of Latin hymns, the chant Requiem Mass, the *Te Deum*, a Forty Hours Section including both music and rubrics, and all of the chant parts harmonized most effectively and with great economy of chords by Dom J-H. Desrocquettes.

The divisions of the book are clear and easily accessible through a very adequate system of indexes which will allow the probing choirmaster to find promptly anything he needs for special occasions.

If we assume that the best harmonic setting to a hymn is the one which is most conducive to good congregational singing, it may be said that by that yardstick the harmonists of the *New Saint Basil* have, in general, done a very commendable job. The chordal treatment given to most hymns enables the organist's playing to help the congregation to sing together. The excessive use of passing notes, on the other hand, would have tended to undermine the rhythmic drive of the more martial tunes and to cloud up the melodic lines of the more expressive ones. Some of our more popular good hymnals are not exempt of that fault.

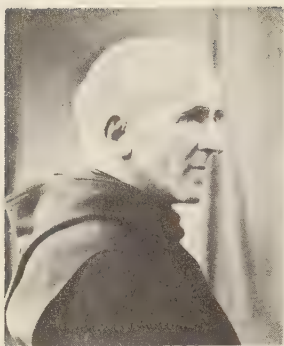
With editorial vigilance and high-mindedness as evidenced through page after page of this hymnal, it is all the more surprising to find that such items as the following managed to sneak in: "Saint Patrick's Breastplate", a sort of dance tune in which the strong beat coincides with the word "Christ", repeated seven times in the first verse. The artistic effect is, to say the least, disconcerting. The two Terry hymns, especially "The Holy Church Now Stands Triumphant", exemplify Victorian stodginess and depend wholly on trite melodic sequences to pull them to the final cadences.



## REVIEWS

These are the flaws, and they are very few. *The New Saint Basil Hymnal* more than deserves to take its place on the already well-stocked shelf of fine liturgical hymnals which have been published in recent years.

Claude P. Lagace



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